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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
THE DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

To : P/PG - Mr. William J. Jordan
From : INR - George C. Denney Jr.
Subject: Responses to Criticisms of US Policy on Vietnam

In accordance with your request of April 7, 1965, we have prepared responses to certain criticisms of United States policy in Vietnam, contained in the critique prepared by the Harvard-Radcliffe May 2 Committee.

Attachment:

Answers to Criticisms of US Policy Contained in
Harvard-Radcliffe May 2nd Committee's Critique on the US White
Paper.

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Answers to Criticism of United States Policy in Vietnam Contained in Harvard-Radcliffe May 2nd Committee's Critique on the United States White Paper

A. General Comments. The Harvard-Radcliffe May 2nd Committee critique of US policy in Vietnam is a hodge-podge of quotations from various sources juxtaposed to give the impression that a large body of experts on Vietnamese affairs consider United States retaliatory strikes against North Vietnam as unjustified and that the Communist insurgency in South Vietnam is a legitimate indigenous resistance to dictatorship. The critique uses these statements, many of which are quoted out of context or derived from suspect sources, to justify its contention that the White Paper is a rationalization designed to help the United States Government "push through a war policy in Vietnam while avoiding the protest that would arise if the American people were given the facts." The critique as a whole is open to the same charges that it levies against the White Paper, as it is clearly inconsistent and full of false allegations and fabrications, obviously designed to misrepresent United States policy toward the Vietnamese situation.

B. Analyses of Specific Points

1. Page 3, first full paragraph

In criticizing United States retaliatory strikes against Dong Hoi as being directed against a non-military target, the critique quotes Bernard Fall to the effect that the Communists would hardly have used Dong Hoi as a military staging area or undertaken "hostile military actions" from it since an ICC fixed team was stationed there at the time of the strikes and would have observed illegal North Vietnamese military activity.

Response

Until recently, an ICC fixed team was stationed at Dong Hoi to monitor the regroupment of military forces following the ceasefire ending the Indochina war in 1954. It is the nearest North Vietnamese city to the Demilitarized Zone along the 17th parallel. It has a population of 55,000, minor port facilities, a naval base, an army divisional headquarters with barracks areas, and an airfield. The ICC fixed team located at Dong Hoi had long been restricted by the North Vietnamese to the town itself and was not permitted by the local authorities to visit the military installations located in its vicinity. Nevertheless, by means of very reliable intelligence, the Vietnamese and United States governments were able to learn of the military development of the Dong Hoi area^{and} of its use as a training and staging area for infiltration into South Vietnam. Unfortunately, the ICC did nothing about these developments. Subsequent to the air strikes on military installations at Dong Hoi and elsewhere, ICC fixed teams located in North Vietnam, except at Hanoi, were withdrawn at the insistence of the North Vietnamese presumably to prevent further disclosure of DRV military activity in the Dong Hoi area and elsewhere.

2. Page 3, third and fourth paragraphCriticism

The critique alleges that United States statements as to the commencement of the Communist assault on South Vietnam are inconsistent, quoting statements by Secretary Rusk, an article by French journalist George Chafford, and the White Paper.

Response

It is a widely accepted fact that the Communists have intended to take over South Vietnam by one means or another since signing the Geneva Accords and agreeing to partition of Vietnam in 1954. It is widely accepted that after partition and the Communist "withdrawal" to north of the 17th Parallel, Hanoi left in the South at least several thousand well-trained, disciplined military cadres, subversive agents, and party members. (See Bernard Fall in his Two-Vietnams published by Praeger in 1963.) Viet Cong intimidation and outright terrorism at the village and hamlet levels continued at a low key after 1954, despite Hanoi's repeated public propaganda that it was abiding by the Geneva Accords and wanted nothing more than elections and reunification. In South Vietnam's urban areas, Viet Cong agents and "front" groups carried on a deceptive "non-violent legal" but actually subversive effort to confuse the war-weary populace and weaken and eventually bring about the political collapse of the then fledgling Diem regime. Viet Cong armed and terrorist activity in the countryside clearly increased by the middle part of 1957, more than two years before the Communists initiated their present all-out campaign in South Vietnam. For example, during one three-month period alone, October-December 1957, there were more than 100 armed attacks, and terrorist incidents committed by the Viet Cong in the countryside, aside from acts of sabotage, espionage, propaganda, and intimidation. During this same period, a minimum of 75 persons were assassinated, kidnapped, or wounded by Communist terrorists; the victims were village elders, ordinary civilians, and local officials. By mid-1958, the size of Viet Cong armed bands generally ranged from 5 to 20 personnel although groups attacking army units occasionally ranged up to 50 men. In some cases, the Viet Cong attacked in strength of 200 or more personnel, as occurred, for example, in Tay Ninh province on January 4, 1958,

3. Pages 7 first and second full paragraphs, page 8 first full paragraphCriticism

The critique contends that the Communist had popular support in South Vietnam in 1954 and would have won free nationwide elections had they been held in 1956, claiming that President Diem refused to hold the elections because of the popularity in South Vietnam of the Communist regime in Hanoi.

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Response

While it is correct that the Viet Minh achieved control over portions of South Vietnam prior to 1954, this control was achieved through force of arms against French colonialist forces. The partition of Vietnam and the formation of a fully independent government under Ngo Dinh Diem challenged for the first time the Communist claim to leadership of nationalist revolutionary movements in Vietnam. Once a truly Vietnamese alternative to Ho Chi Minh's regime was established, the real unpopularity of the Communists became obvious. This unpopularity is clearly demonstrated by the fact that following partition 900,000 refugees came South to live under the Diem government, while only about 150,000 Viet Minh guerrillas and their dependents went North to join their Communist brethren..

As to the critique's contention that the Diem government refused to hold free elections because it feared the popularity of the Communist regime in Vietnam, neither the United States nor the Republic of Vietnam have ever been opposed to genuinely free elections. Both governments have publicly and consistently reiterated their desire to have satisfactory arrangements for such elections worked out between the parties directly concerned. The problem has been that the necessary conditions for truly free elections have never existed in North Vietnam under Communist control.

It is clear from the testimony of the North Vietnamese Communist leadership that conditions of freedom did not exist in North Vietnam in the period from 1954 to 1956 and that it was impossible to envisage "free general elections" during that period. In a speech printed in the North Vietnamese Communist Party newspaper Nhan Dan on October 31, 1956, General Vo Nguyen Giap as the party's spokesman made the following admissions of "errors" to the 10th Congress of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee: "We made too many deviations and executed too many honest people. We attacked on too large a front and, seeing enemies everywhere, resorted to terror, which became far too widespread... Whilst carrying out our land reform program we failed to respect the principles of freedom of faith and worship in many areas...in regions inhabited by minority tribes we have attacked tribal chiefs too strongly, thus injuring, instead of respecting, local customs and manners... When reorganizing the party, we paid too much importance to the notion of social class instead of adhering firmly to political qualifications alone. Instead of recognizing education to be the first essential, we resorted exclusively to organizational measures such as disciplinary punishments, expulsion from the party, executions, dissolution of party branches and cells. Worse still, torture came to be regarded as a normal practice during party reorganization."

The inability of the International Control Commission to enforce other parts of the Geneva accords showed that adequate conditions for free elections could not be assured in the north. Given conditions in North Vietnam, a free election was and still is clearly out of the question. Furthermore, not until hostilities cease in South Vietnam and North Vietnam stops its interference in the affairs of South Vietnam will it be physically possible to hold free general elections in Vietnam.

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In the final plenary session of the 1954 Geneva Conference, the delegation of the State of Vietnam went on the record as "solemnly protesting against the fact that the French High Command was pleased to take the right without a preliminary agreement of the delegation of the State of Vietnam to set the date of future elections." In a unilateral statement made at the same time, the United States representative made it clear in connection with the foregoing Vietnamese statement that the United States reiterated its traditional American position that peoples are entitled to determine their own future and that the United States would not join in an arrangement which would hinder this. The United States Government also made it clear that in the case of nations divided against their will the United States would continue to seek to achieve unity through free elections supervised by the United Nations to ensure that they were conducted fairly.

4. Page 8, second full paragraph

Criticism

The critique points out that the White Paper implies that political democracy did not exist in South Vietnam after 1954 and contends that the Diem government was able to remain in power only through assuring dictatorial power.

Response

Many of the charges levied against the Diem administration of excessive political personalization, centralization, and indeed harshness and authoritarianism in government cannot be denied. It is forgotten, however, that even during its latter years the Diem government never compared with the dictatorial, pervasive, police-state, brutal, and anti-religious character of the Communist regime in the North. It is forgotten that the early years after 1954 in effect constituted a South Vietnamese political, social, and economic revolution. During this brief period, South Vietnam removed all vestiges of direct or indirect French controls and achieved complete independence from France. During this brief period, South Vietnam established institutions of government which had been obscure, completely arbitrary, or even totally lacking in the previous Bao Dai regimes, e.g., Vietnam's first constitution, first national elections, first national parliament, first completely Vietnamese judicial system, and first completely Vietnamese military, security, and police establishment.

5. Page 12, first full paragraph

Criticism

Quoting fragmentary quotations from several different sources, the critique charges that the Diem regime arrested and imprisoned thousands of persons for political offenses.

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Response

The charge that persons were imprisoned for political offenses is true. While this is not to excuse reports of arbitrary police handling of offenders or suspects, it is forgotten that political imprisonment for such offenses is recognized as legal by French jurisprudence, the system of law prevailing in Vietnam and other countries. It is forgotten too that at least a large percentage of the political prisoners were Communist. Many but by no means all political prisoners were held in Political Re-education Centers directed by the Ministry of Interior, but these were not "concentration" camps, as charged by some writers. In fact, even though thousands of political prisoners have reportedly been released by successor governments after careful screening, Political Re-education Centers still exist in South Vietnam.

6. Page 12 last paragraphCriticism

The critique quotes fragments of Bernard Fall's The Two Viet-Nam's to contend that the land reform introduced by the Viet Minh in the areas of South Vietnam under their control between 1945 and 1955 was more humane than the land reform introduced by the legitimate government.

Response

The full quotation from Bernard Fall on the Viet Minh land reform is considerably more accurate.

"Of the three land-reform programs tried in the South, the Viet-Minh's had the unique advantage of being brutal and direct: Since most of the landlords had fled to Saigon, their holdings were there for the taking, and the Viet-Minh could reap the propaganda proceeds by issuing new ownership certificates to the former sharecroppers or the squatters. This Communist land reform also benefited from two important psychological advantages -- it made no demands upon the peasants for payments; and it had been in effect in some areas from 1945 until 1955, i.e., at least three times as long as any of the competing nationalist reform measures. This is a key factor that apparently has remained unrecognized thus far."

7. Page 14 second through fourth paragraphsCriticism

The critique contends that alleged government terror in the countryside and government failure to provide enough food or jobs to keep up with population growth led to a revolt by the Vietnamese peasantry and the emergence of the Viet Cong as the agency of that revolt.

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Response

With regard to the claim that the GVN failed to provide enough food or jobs to keep up with population growth, the Diem government's most outstanding achievement was the degree of economic progress it achieved in an economy basically agrarian. However inadequate and at times ineffective and even harsh the Diem government's approach to problems in the countryside, the fact remains that almost a million refugees were given relief assistance, rehabilitated, and resettled in South Vietnam by 1957 -- i.e., within two years after their exodus from the North. The fact remains that rice acreage rose from 4 million acres in 1954 to nearly 7.5 million in 1958 and rice production from just over 2 million tons in 1954 to nearly 4 million tons by 1958; rice production continued to rise to 5 million tons by 1960. The fact remains that rubber production, just over fifty thousand tons in 1954 and a major export commodity, rose to over seventy-five thousand tons by 1960. The fact remains that Diem's land reform program resulted in the redistribution of some 245,000 hectares of land to about 115,000 farm families, with a legal ceiling established on rent payments required by tenant farmers. The fact remains that by 1961 a rural health program established simple dispensaries in half of South Vietnam's villages. The fact remains that, as a result of an ambitious nation-wide six-year anti-malaria program, more than 6,000 tons of DDT were sprayed by the end of 1963 on homes throughout the countryside; by mid-1960 alone the homes sprayed numbered more than 2,300,000. Finally, by 1960 the estimated per capita income in South Vietnam rose to \$110 as compared to \$70 in the North, despite the vastly larger industrial plant inherited in the North by the partition of Vietnam in 1954.

See the responses to criticisms 2, 4 and 5 with regard to the contention that a peasant revolt and the Viet Cong sprang up spontaneously in response to GVN terror.

8. Page 14 last paragraph (over to page 15)Criticism

The report contends that the Viet Cong are more humane than the government forces.

Response

In addition to the material provided in the response to criticism 2, note the following statistics on Communist terrorism against civilians during 1963, 1964, and the first 3 months of 1965.

a. Assassinated	1963	1964	1965(ist 3 months)
Civilian population	1,558	1,350	301
Government officials	515	436	89
	2,073	1,786	390
b. Injured	8,375	2,131	478
c. Kidnapped	7,262	9,531	1,687
	17,710	13,448	2,555

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9. Page 15 second full paragraph

Criticism

The critique quotes a statement in an article by Philippe Devillers that: "IN December 1958 the death of some 20 Viet Cong detainees in the Phu Loi concentration camp served to fan the flames of anger of the guerrillas"....

Response

DRV propaganda actually charged that the South Vietnamese government had executed by food poisoning as many as 1,000 inmates in the Phu Loi reeducation center. The charge was categorically denied by the South Vietnamese government and there is no indication that any food poisoning which may have occurred at the camp was anything but completely accidental. "The flames of anger of the guerrillas" were fanned by DRV propaganda exploitation of fabricated DRV charges. One might also note the 6,000 persons believed to have been killed or deported by the Communists in a peasant revolt in Nghe En province of North Vietnam in November 1956, and the countless others that died in the brutal DRV land reform which the regime publically confessed was a "mistake."

10. Page 15 third and fourth full paragraphs

Criticism

The report again contends that resistance to the Diem regime was spontaneous, that Hanoi only protested alleged GVN repression by "diplomatic notes," and that the Communists only joined the resistance in 1959.

Response

See the responses to previous criticisms and the arguments adduced in the White Paper and the early Departmental Paper "A Threat to the Peace" published in December 1961.

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April 19, 1965